DEPARTMENT OF
MUSIC
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

ZENITHS AND NADIRS

Allison Balcetis

saxophones

Monday May 30, 2011 7:00pm
Convocation Hall, University of Alberta

Anubis (1983 / 1990) — Gérard Grisey (1946-1998)
Nout
bass saxophone

...sur un îlot de la rivière... (2006) — François Rossé (b. 1945)
soprano saxophone

Le Fusain Fuit La Gomme (1999) — Marie-Hélène Fournier (b. 1943)
baritone saxophone

Digital (1995) — Thierry Alla (b. 1955)
soprano saxophone

Saxo-1 (1987 / 2004) — Ivo Malec (b. 1925)
baritone saxophone

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of a Doctorate of Music Degree for Allison Balcetis.

Anubis et Nout was originally written in 1983 for contrabass clarinet but was transcribed by Gérard Grisey for bass saxophone in 1990 for Claude Delangle, saxophone professor at the CNSM de Paris. Both movements of this work are spectral yet polar opposites in terms of energy and movement. In *Anubis* (named after the Egyptian god of the underworld), Grisey makes use of the harmonic spectrum - the spectrum that comprises every pitch – and its inverted formation as a pitch palette, going from the higher partials and descending to the fundamental of a pitch. These two spectra placed back to back create "pitch pendulums" in which Grisey plays with predictable and unpredictable movement. *Nout* (named after the goddess of the sky) is entirely different in feel although composed of in a spectral way. Rather than pulling apart and treating separately each note of a harmonic series, Grisey uses the spectrum more literally with the performer often beginning on an upper partial and with glacial speed and inevitability, descending and sinking into the fundamental (from Rhonda Taylor's dissertation *Gérard Grisey's Anubis et Nout: A Historical and Analytical Perspective*, 2005).

*...sur un îlot de la rivière...*can be easily described in terms of manic versus static energy. François Rossé's transitions from mania to stillness are sometimes produced in a very abrupt manner, and this is most evident between the three major sections of the piece. Unlike the unpredictability of the beginning, the middle section is reminiscent of solemn ceremonial music, ushered in and out by the slow and regular ringing of a bell-like multiphonic, clearing the air for the recitation of the first poem, *Ode Kouan Chu*, from the *Shih Ching* compiled by Confucius. Of the verses below the third stanza is the one recited *in Mandarin* in the piece.

Kuan-kuan, the ospreys
On the river's isle
Delicate, a good girl:
A gentleman's fit mate.

Long and short, duckweeds.
Fetch some – left and right.
Delicate, a good girl.
Waking, sleeping: seek her.

To seek her and possess not –
Waking, sleeping: think of her.
So distant, so deep;
Toss and turn in bed.

Long and short, duckweeds.
Pluck some – left and right.
Delicate, a good girl:
With music to befriend her
Pick some – left and right.
Delicate, a good girl:
With bells and drums to meet her.

Marie-Hélène Fournier's *Le Fusain Fuit La Gomme* for baritone exposes the inner pitches of a note over a long period of time. The translation of the title "the charcoal flees the eraser" – and the smeared result – is an apt and literal, depiction of the sound. The flight is obvious in the rapid notes of the depths of the instrument, transforming slowly (smearing the singular line) to reveal their harmonic structure. The degree to which Fournier has researched the harmonics of these notes and the idiomatic properties of the saxophone is what makes the piece fascinating and original. In the middle section she creates multiphonics out of "fractured" fingerings (a fingering using most of the tube of the instrument but with one finger lifted, opening a hole in this tube) whose polyphony

only works by softly slapping the reed with one's tongue. The result is a subtle, soft, percussive chord progression flowing in the deep range of the instrument.

In Thierry Alla's *Digital* he starts with the simplicity and purity of one note, then delves inside it and spreads its harmonic structure apart, not at all unlike Fournier's introduction in *Le Fusain Fuit La Gomme*. The piece can be described in three parts based on the treatment of multiphonics: perpetual motion, calm dissection, and combining multiphonics and trills.

Ivo Malec's *Saxo- 1* for baritone saxophone is special for its relation to the theme of zeniths and nadirs. Originally a plaintive, powerful solo for cello (*Arco-1* 1987), this transcription rests often very high in the baritone saxophone's altissimo range. Although Malec envisioned a low resonant instrument he frequently (as might have been more idiomatic in the cello) writes leaping intervals several octaves from altissimo to the bottom of the range. One of the striking qualities of this work is its brutal, heart-wrenching beginning. The performance notes at the beginning of the work call for "*violent, dense, intense, expressif, comme une immense plainte*" (violent, dense, intense, expressive like an immense wail).

Allison Balcetis holds degrees from Bowling Green State University, where she studied with Dr. John Sampen, and has the honour of being the first—and only—saxophonist to earn a joint degree from the Université de Bordeaux and the Conservatoire National de Région de Bordeaux where she studied with Marie-Bernadette Charrier. She is currently a doctoral candidate under the direction of Dr. William Street. Her performances as a soloist and a member of the Anubis Quartet have taken her to Italy, Slovenia, France, Thailand, and North America.